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ACCOUNTS AND COUNTS OF JEWISH TIME

In his comprehensive overview on "The Medieval West and Time", Jacques Le Goff states: "The main conceptual and methodological innovation in recent historical thought has been the replacement of a unitary, linear and objective, mathematically divisible concept of time by a multiple, bountiful, reversible, subjective concept, much more qualitative than quantitative. The notion of time itself has often given way to the more malleable one of duration."¹ There is no better illustration of this observation than studies carried out in this field over the last few decades, in which the conceptual developments have gone beyond the pioneering works of German researchers such as Ludwig Ideler², Franz K. Ginzel³ and Otto Neugebauer⁴. While implementing an exceptional scope of knowledge which counteracted, without their entirely realizing it, the idea that time is only measurement, they nevertheless described the "mathematical chronologies", the *Zeitrechnung*, and astronomical tables civilizations employ to position themselves in time. Philosophy, theology and the philosophy of history⁵ have contributed to the edification of an abundant corpus of material on time⁶, most of which deals with the mediation of Christian time in the formation of Western thought. On the subject of time itself, a large number of theologians, for the most part from the Christian world, have focused on the Bible following in the wake of the trend that

¹ J. le Goff, *Un Autre Moyen Age*, Paris, Gallimard, Quarto, p. 403.

² Ludwig Ideler, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*, Berlin, 1825.

³ Friedrich Karl Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie* (3 vol), Leipzig, 1906-1914; 1951.

⁴ Otto Neugebauer, while situating his works in the field of astronomy, mostly studied calendars: *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1975; see also *Astronomy and History, Selected Essays*, New York, Berlin, Heidelberg, Tokyo, 1983.

⁵ A list of works devoted to time would be fastidious; thus only titles or specific authors will be referred to in this article. Here, see Horst Günther, *Le temps de l'histoire, Expérience du monde et catégories temporelles en philosophie de l'histoire de Saint Augustin à Pétrarque de Dante à Rousseau*, Paris, MSH, 1995.

⁶ L. Gardet, A. J. Gurevitch, A. Kagame, C.Larre, et al., *Cultures & Time*, Paris, The Unesco Press, 1976.

propelled Biblical criticism to become the top-ranking center of interest.⁷ Clearly revealing ideological stances, these works, based on linguistic analysis and assisted by the vogue for comparative studies, were presumably contributions to evolutions in culture.⁸ Between the primitive archaism of the Barbarians and the most highly refined stage of civilization introduced by Christianity, the Old Testament occupied a transitional place. Through the emergence of Monotheism it enabled the idea of linear time⁹ to make inroads, thus paving the way to history.¹⁰ In the spirit of these works, the terms used to express an approach to time were hence likely to reveal the degree of evolution attained by the culture from which they emanated. Challenged by both specialists of Antiquity¹¹ as by Bible scholars¹², this evolutionary approach has been discarded today.¹³

⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testament*, 2 volumes, Munich, Kaiser Verlag, 1957, 1960, 1980. *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1, *Théologie des traditions historiques d'Israël*, French translation, Etienne de Peyer, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1963; 2, *Théologie des traditions prophétiques d'Israël*, translated by André Goy, 1968.

⁸ Thorleif Boman, *Das Hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen*, Göttingen, 1954, 139, English: *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, New York, 1960, 1970; Conrad von Orelli, *Die Hebräische Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit*, Leipzig, 1871.

⁹ The idea of linear time has been challenged considerably; in works which have begun in the Jewish field, see Moshe Idel, "Some Concepts of Time and History in Kabbalah", in Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron and David N. Myers (eds), *Jewish History and Jewish Memory, Essays in Honor of Yosef Yerushalmi*, Hannover and London, Brandeis U.P., 1998, as well as Tamar M. Rudavsky, *Time Matters, Time, Creation and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000.

¹⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968.

¹¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Temps des dieux, temps des hommes" *RHR*, 157, 1960, 55-80; reprinted in *Le Chasseur Noir; formes de pensées et formes de sociétés dans le monde grec*, Paris, Maspéro, 1981. Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd, "Views on Time in Greek Thought," in L. Gardet, A.J. Gurevitch, A. Kagame *et al.*, *Cultures and Time*, Paris UNESCO Press, 1976, pp. 117-148; Arnaldo Momigliano, "Time in Ancient Historiography", *History and Theory*, 5 Beiheft 6, 1966, 1-23.

¹² John Marsh, *The Fullness of Time*, London 1952. See appendix on the work of Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, London, 1951, pp.175-179 and in particular the series of works by James Barr, including *Biblical Words for Time*, London 1962, 1969; *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London, 1961.

¹³ However... see work by Sara Japhet on certain recent studies: "In Search of Ancient Israel: Revisionism at All Costs", in David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman (eds), *The Jewish Past Revisited, Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 212 - 233.

The anthropological approach can however shed a different light on these works. As A. Bensa argued, "all culture is first of all a certain experience of time." The specificity of period also reflects the tensions arising from the interweaving of "the contemporary nature of attitudes inherited from the past and behaviors induced by new issues."¹⁴ The time line created by a particular group can thus be used to analyze its degree of exchange and dealings with its environment. In this perspective, the mathematical metaphor of "temporal equation" sheds light on the role of the calendar and its importance as a marker of time. Situated precisely at the intersection of cultural knowledge and systems of belief, the fit - as symbolic agency- of the calendar depends on its ability to match the order of time to the cultural model of the groups who adhere to it. The various components that combine to form a cultural calendar constitute these 'hidden rhythms'¹⁵ which give time its fullness. The calendar sequence is then experienced in such a natural way that one would almost believe it to be spontaneous if the accumulation of centuries of cultural transformations had not left its imprint.¹⁶ However, the true relationship which exists to this day between the vast amount of knowledge in the field of astronomy, the rhythm of the seasons, and the beliefs of Western cultures reveals an enormous disparity with the calendar that governs societal rhythms. In fact this calendar works because of the deployment of a thousand temporal fractions. It accommodates different registers, diverse scales, and enables a coexistence between advances in science and a lessening of beliefs, while at the same time drawing on a common source that arises from the centuries which preceded its establishment. In short, in order to study the Western calendar as a whole, we need to differentiate the seasonal, political, athletic, vocational, cultural, academic, professional and religious agendas-which make it current-- from its age-old content, based on ancient agrarian rhythms, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman astronomies, as well as dates set down by the Church and national histories. Social time is thus made up of a succession of differentiated temporal rhythms, which bring together subsets of groups or individuals who relate to a specific temporal order determined by membership in a religion, an age bracket, specific inclinations or professional obligations.

¹⁴ Alban Bensa, "Vers une anthropologie critique", in J. Revel, (ed.) *Jeux d'échelles. La microanalyse à l'expérience*, Paris, Hautes Etudes/ Gallimard/ Le Seuil, 1996, pp.54-55.

¹⁵ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms, Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*, Chicago & London, 1981.

¹⁶ Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1984.

Starting from G. Gurvich's statement that "No concrete social framework (...) no society as a whole (...) can be analyzed in terms of its differences with other types of cultures without setting it in the times in which it lives,"¹⁷ one can raise the issue of the development, which led to the construction, over the centuries, of "Jewish time": in which times should Jewish temporality, which has survived throughout the ages, be placed?

The notion of time, a volatile and imprecise substance if there ever was one, was hence constructed from multiple sources that draw both on culture and on the sciences. The construction of a "Jewish" time, was built up from elements which meld the religious into the cultural. Elaborated by drawing on its Biblical source and the corpus of religious laws, this edification, although endowed with its own particular features, nevertheless entertained relationships with cultural universes which impacted on the Jews and which were affected by this universe in return. Although the idea of time is highly subjective and clearly qualitative, it is more than the subject of a narrative, the vector of a founding transmission: time is the frame which dominates the Jewish way of life. As presented here, accounts of time form a connection between the past, the future and the present: their lexicon interweaves notions inherited from a variety of historical, philosophical and theological traditions. Starting from the premise that Judaism invented a form of temporality that replays itself permanently by the re-implanting of the past in the present, tales of time can be seen as the guardians of its memory and its history. However, to inscribe the Jewish past into time and history, the calculation of time places the history of Israel at the start of the creation of the world. The Bible story, by preserving the memory of the emergence of monotheism, prolongs the evolution of mankind from its beginnings by an unfolding of a national history. As a witness to the creation of the world, it is the guarantor of the continuity of the Jewish people. The authors of the Biblical narrative, by laying down its canon, also established the axes of temporal directionality, plotting the stepping stones leading to the future. Anchored to the time scale, the time line moves in the flux of human temporality. By setting an origin, it orients towards its end point. The unfolding of this temporal axis situates and places historical events into a "Jewish" course of events, thus appropriating the flow of time. This axis is studded with various temporal scansions; these scansions thus form a chain that is simultaneously historical, mathematical and eschatological. The mosaic of time is built up in the interlocking of history and eschatology.

¹⁷ Georges Gurvitch, "La Multiplicité des temps sociaux", in *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie*, 2, Paris, 1953, p.236.

The registers of time have a dual mission; they intermix within experienced time to form the core of the Jewish *modus vivendi*. Transmission of tradition and the structuring of social time are thus prime aspects for the transfer of Jewish identity. The orientation of the axis and the direction of time are of crucial importance because time is perceived as the major eschatological thread. As long as time does not appear to be determined by its end point, there is no need to mark the direction of the time line. When time is seen as having a starting point leading to a final conclusion, its linearity presupposes that creation, the beginning of time, will inevitably reach its end point, either the coming of the messianic era or the end of its charted course.

The temporal disposition shapes a lifestyle in which the assignment of sacred and secular periods sets apart the Hebrews from other peoples. According to tradition this is stated in this verse from Genesis: "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times - the days and the years."¹⁸ Jewish time is above all organized around the value of the number seven.¹⁹ It governs the rhythm of the week, which gravitates around the Sabbath, and the cycles of "weeks of years" which cover the periods when the land is at rest (Shemitta) and the Jubilees. It inscribes mortal duration into the rhythm of the creation of the world ("And on the seventh day he rested."). This order makes one day a week a time out-of-time, since it is entirely devoted to the sacred. Named for its position, the Jewish week is called '*shavu'ah*' (seven) thus indicating the numerical sequence which goes from one seventh day to the next. This arrangement by week, organized around the day which stands for a cyclical and recurrent hiatus ascribed each week to God, designates each day by its number, ranging from the first day which starts the week, coming after the Sabbath, to the sixth, which precedes it and is the preparation for it, *erev shabbat*, the evening before the Sabbath. The Jewish week is simply arranged according to the numerical name of its intervals, by day one, day two, day three until the sixth day. Although the week structured around the Sabbath is observed everywhere, the 'weeks of years' which govern the social and agricultural laws connected to the time the land lies fallow, are only meaningful in the land of Israel. These two references, to time and to space, have preserved the cohesion of a scattered people throughout exiles, through a permanency translated by the sharing of the same temporal register. It was only when the connection between the

¹⁸ Genesis I,14, which Rashi interprets as a division between "Jewish " and "Non-Jewish" time, Gn. *ad loc*.

¹⁹ Israel Zeligman, *The Treasury of Numbers* (Hebrew), New York, Shulsinger, 1942.

land and the Jews was severed, i.e. after the destruction of the Temple, that the creation of a "space-time" concentrated around the Sabbath became a necessity.

The edification of this space-time that has spanned the ages went through a series of changes before it became stable, prompting previous phases of development into oblivion. The ancient Hebrew calendar provided few specific details on its construction over the centuries. The first indications dealing with the calendar only date back to the time of the Mishna, between the end of the first century BCE and the second century CE. However, the Bible, the scrolls discovered at Qumram, and several ancient texts older or contemporary with the first centuries BCE provide material if not real data for hypotheses. The Jewish calendar, inheriting from ancient Semitic civilizations, is altogether lunar and solar, thus revealing the influences that shaped it. It may reflect the stormy history of the Israelites before rabbinical normalization at the turn of the era. Between the first and second Temples, the Hebrews were subjected to the simultaneous rule of Egypt and Babylonia. These influences can be found in the rare mentions which may refer to a Biblical calendar divided between solar equinoxes (the Egyptian influence) and the new moons (inherited from Mesopotamia/ Babylonia). They also show that the months were in reverse numerical order to what is used today, the names of which come, according to the Talmud, from Babylonia.²⁰ The commandment to observe the new year, which is celebrated today in the autumn, is set down in the Book of Exodus after the departure from Egypt, which is still celebrated in the spring during the festival of Passover. It states clearly " This month for you shall mark the beginning of the months, it shall be the first of the months of the year for you."..."In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion."²¹

Beyond its formal drawing up at the time of Hillel II, in 359 - 360²² the history of the Jewish calendar²³ is rife with tension. Jewish traditional texts transmitted a calendar, via information found in the Talmud, most of whose bases are still used today. However, because the question of time,

²⁰ Jerusalem Talmud, *RH*, 1.1.

²¹ Exodus XII, 2; Leviticus, XXIII, 24; Numbers, XXIX, 1.

²² *Arakhin*, 9b, also Isaac Israeli, *Yesod Olam* (circa 1310), Berlin, J. Shklover, 1777, 4, 5, 9.

²³ F.K. Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*, (3 vol), vol 2. *Zeitrechnung Der Juden Der Naturvolker, Der Romer Und Griechen*, Leipzig, 1906 -14; Eduard Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1967 (reprinted Frankfurt/Main, 1916).

under its dual dimension of its order and its calculation, was primordial, establishing a calendar was the locus of intense struggles for power, political clashes and ideological disputes, always expressed in terms of theological controversy. The tone and the focus of these disputes were deliberately kept vague because they revealed secrets that had to be preserved, since the calendar was considered to be the revelation of the divine voice, as is clearly stated in the terms used in the books of Enoch 1 and Jubilees. From the return of the exiles to Palestine in 538 BCE, rivalry never ceased to exist between the communities of Jerusalem and Babylonia. The worsening, over the centuries,²⁴ of their differences in the legal and ritual fields had an impact on the supremacy of one of these two capitals of Jewish culture over the other. Their antagonism can be summarized as follows: although the principles of Judaism were forged by the reforms introduced by Ezra on the return from the first exile in Babylonia, the holiness ascribed to the land of Palestine nevertheless granted the authorities who lived there decisional power. It was, the privilege of the members of the Sanhedrin to proclaim the new moon, which would set the days of the year by intercalating other days, as a function of the conjunction between the first crops and the position of the moon.²⁵ The order of time thus was under the sole jurisdiction of the Temple, and later the Palestinian patriarchate. In fact, a dispute over the calendar in the tenth century put an end to the primacy of Jerusalem as the spiritual authority, and marked the victory of the academies of Babylonia in legislative areas.²⁶ This at the same time heralded the recognition of

²⁴ Robert Bonfil, "Bein Erets Yisrael le-beyn Bavel" (Between Israel and Babylonia), *Shalem*, 5, 1987, pp.1-30; Id, " Le savoir et le pouvoir, Pour une histoire du rabbinat à l'époque pré-moderne" in Shmuel Trigano, (ed) *La société juive à travers l'histoire*, Paris, Fayard, 4 vols, 1992, 1, pp. 115-195.

²⁵ " The Sages said: Even when the righteous and the wise are outside the Land, and the keepers of the sheep and herds are in the Land, they do not intercalate the year except through the keepers of sheep and herds in the Land. Even when the Prophets are outside the Land and the ignorant are in the Land they do not intercalate the year except through the ignorant who are in the Land [of Israel]....On account of three things is the year intercalated, on account of the trees, the grass and the seasons [Tekuphoth]. *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* (830), ch.VIII, p.56, translated by Gerald Friedlander, Hermon Press, New York, 1965.

²⁶ H.Y. Bornstein, *Mahloqet RaSaG u-ben Meir*, in *Sokolow Jubilees Volume*, Warsaw, 1904; S.W. Baron, "Saadia's Communal Activities," in *Saadia Anniversary Volume*, New York, American Academy for Jewish Research, 1943, pp. 9 -74; Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*, New Haven and London, Yale U. Press, 1998, especially the chapter

Diaspora power and the end of inspection of the land of Israel, henceforth replaced by astronomical calculations to set the annual cycle. It was also over an issue of calendars that the Samaritans and Karaites broke away from Judaism, before facing off over the chronology of origins with Jews and Christians.

Are the calendar and chronology mutually determined? The calendar has several registers composed of religious, eschatological, seasonal, historical and national elements that give it its specificity and inscribe time in its particular order. The organization of the calendar, whether liturgical or agricultural, long predates -- as far as we know -- the invention of eras and the measurement of time. The calendar is, in its essence, and by necessity, cyclical: it governs experienced time at a rhythm of set recurrences, if not regular ones, as the seasons can be. The measurement of past time, which preceded the era system, organizes national chronologies into a path which, departing from the order of nature, becomes social and linear, as a function of historical changes: the beginnings or ends of reigns, the transformation of empires or a notable event.²⁷

Although the biblical narrative inscribes the Israelites in a history it hardly ever sets these events at a particular time. Events and individuals occur in a sequence which is less a chronology than a thematic pattern, which the Christian Biblical scholars termed the "history of redemption."²⁸ Among the texts in the period between the Old and New Testaments, such as the books of *Jubilees* or *Enoch*, or among the fragments found in Qumran, those which contain references to the calendar and/or astronomical references attest as much to the existence of a solar calendar, as shown in the following verse: "He wrote psalms [...] for all the days of the year, 364, and for the sacrifice for the new months [...] 30 songs."²⁹ than to knowledge of the existence of the lunar calendar denounced in *Enoch* 1.³⁰ Aside from their calendar, some of the same texts contain biblical chronologies oriented by an eschatological perspective. The

"Competition with the Palestinian Center."

²⁷ Elias J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World, Aspects of Greek and Roman Life*, London Thames and Hudson, 1968.

²⁸ See S.A. Goldberg, "De la Bible et des notions d'espace et de temps. Essai sur l'usage des catégories dans le monde achkénaze du Moyen Age à l'époque moderne," in *Annales HSS*, 5, septembre-octobre, 1997, pp. 987- 1015.

²⁹ Pseudo-Davidic Psalms, 11QPSa 27, 5-9, *La Bible, écrits intertestamentaires*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987. John Strugnell, "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran", *Vetus Testamentum Supplementae*, 7, 1960, pp. 318 - 345.

³⁰ 1 *Enoch* 80, 1-7.

explanation for this solar calendar remains one of the major enigmas of the history of the period the Second Temple. Nevertheless, in current research there is an ongoing debate as to its use as well as its interpretations.³¹ Does it testify to, as many claim, a theological dissidence that would have led radical fringe groups to demand a revolution in the calendar? Or, on the contrary, was it due to transformations in the various streams of Judaism, and aimed at modifying its secular order?³²

In addition to these thorny issues, a document anchored in the Tannaitic and Pharisee tradition, introduces further complexities. Ascribed by the Talmud to the partisans of Eleazar ben Haninah³³, accused by Flavius Josephus to have led the revolt against the Romans,³⁴ the Scroll of Fasts, or *Megillat Ta'anit*³⁵ describes, as its name does not suggest, a list of 35 days in the year when it is forbidden to fast. Although it is probably one of the oldest Jewish legislative texts -- it is thought to have been written at the time of the revolt against the Romans (66-70) or at the latest, the revolt of Bar Kochba (132- 135) - and is not included in the traditional corpus. These 35 holidays, advocated during the period of the Second Temple, are all connected to events that are not mentioned in the Scriptures. Military victories of the Hasmonean period, or commemorations of legislative successes by the Pharisees over the Sadducees, some of the

³¹ The report presented by Francis Schmidt, "L'étranger, le Temple et la loi dans le judaïsme ancien," in particular Devorah Dimant, "Signification et importance des manuscrits de la mer Morte." *L'Etat actuel des études Qoumranienues*," *Annales HSS*, 5. 1996, pp. 975 - 1004; as well as the overview by J.C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Measuring Time*, London and New York, 1998.

³² See Albert I. Baumgarten, *The flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, as well as Michael Chyutin, *The Wars of the Calendars in the Period of the Second Temple and the Redaction of the Psalms According to the Calendar*, (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, Moden, 1993.

³³ *Shabbat* 13b.

³⁴ Josephus Fl. *The Jewish War*, in the French transl. *La Guerre des juifs*, trans. by P. Savinel, Paris, Editions du Minuit, 1977, 2, 17, 409; 2, 20,3.

³⁵ *Seder Olam rabba ve-seder olam zutta u-megillat ta'anit, ve sefer ha'qabbalah le'ha RaBaD 'zal' ve 'divrei malkei (Yisrael be), bayyit sheni, ve-zikhron divrei romiyim*, Mantua in 1514, Amsterdam, 1710-11. The Aramaic text appears in Adolf Neubauer, *Anecdota Axioniensa. Medieval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological notes edited from printed books and manuscripts*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1895, 2d edition Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 3-25; also published, by Solomon Zeitlin, *Megillat Ta'anit as a source for Jewish Chronology and History*, Philadelphia, Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1922; more recently in Hebrew, Ben Zion Lurya, *Megillat Ta'anit*, Jerusalem, Mossad Bialik, 1964.

events can be situated in Roman times, although no episode has ever been located after 66/67. Arranged starting from the month of Nisan, in the spring,³⁶ this calendar corroborates Josephus' observation perfectly that since Moses, this month starts the annual cycle of Torah reading.³⁷ Thus apparently at the time of the Second Temple and until its destruction, the religious year began in the Spring. In this sense, whether the texts found around Qumran are either the effect of dissidence or reflect various competitive streams within Judaism, does not negate the fact that the solar system at the root of this order formed, at least partially, a religious calendar.

These commemorations, abandoned after the destruction of the Temple, with the exception of two holidays, however confirm beyond any doubt the presence of a national calendar, recognized at least by some groups of Jews, and rejected after the devastation of Palestine. The fact that this agenda based on the recollection of historical dates was dropped, clearly illustrates the changes in the relationship of Jews to politics, but moreover, sealed the transition of Judaism to the normative. The preservation, in a Jewish calendar, now unified along the Babylonian model,³⁸ of holidays considered to be historical such as Purim and Hanukkah can nevertheless be explained by their great popularity as by the diluting of their historical content in tradition. Purim, the feast of 'lots' is a holiday in a carnival spirit, which nevertheless perpetuates the hope of seeing the eternal enemies of Israel vanquished, whereas the holiday of Hanukkah preserves the hope of the miraculous re-conquest of the Temple.

During the period extending from the beginning of the writing of the Mishna to the period considered to be the end of the Talmud, a process was taking place within Rabbinical thought which tended to include the history of mankind within a Jewish chronology. This shift, which would finally adopt a method of dating on the basis of the age of the world, was at its inception; this mode of reference had yet to appear on any official document. It appears here and there, mentioned occasionally, in a *Baraita* or in a Talmudic quote without however, having a particular significance until a much later period. The Talmud states that the change in numerical

³⁶ Which goes against the claim of the Mishna that the month of Nisan is only "the day of the year for Kings and for pilgrimages" *Rosh Hashanah*, I.1.

³⁷ *Les antiquités juives*, vol 1-5, translated by Etienne Nodet, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1992, I, 3,3p. 81

³⁸ See the victory of Rabbi Gamliel over Rabbi Joshua concerning the determination of the date of Yom Kippur, *RH*, 2, 8-9.

date of the year takes place at Rosh Hashanah.³⁹ The calculation of time based on the presumed date of creation, although instituted at a late date, is rooted in Antiquity. No ancient chronographies written by Jews have survived the ravages of time,⁴⁰ but patristic texts have transmitted fragments, via Eusebe of Cesarea and Clement of Alexandria⁴¹ which, without denying their possible interpolations⁴², nevertheless testify to an intense chronographic activity during the three or four final centuries preceding the Christian era and the transition to Rabbinical Judaism. A Hebrew text, the *Seder Olam*, or *Order of the World*, which the Talmud attributes to a sage of the third century⁴³, but which was probably written between the first and the second centuries⁴⁴ establishes an exegetic chronology of the Bible, then extends it to the Bar Kochba revolt, through Alexander the Great. These texts, written in Greek and in Hebrew/Aramaic, to which should be added the *Jewish Antiquities* by Flavius Josephus, all situate episodes described in the Bible in a coherent historical sequence: creation of the world, flood, patriarchs, exodus from Egypt, judges, kings, prophets and construction/destruction of the Temple all follow one another, thus forging a continuity in duration which enables time to be inscribed in a linear path. Based on the extended figures used in the Greek version of the Septuagint, or those appearing in the Masoretic text which prefigures the Hebrew Bible which have come down to us, these chronographies open on to the Christian or Jewish *era mundi*. The disparities between the two versions relate to the era when the church fathers were writing their own chronology, over about two thousand years.

³⁹ RH 2b.

⁴⁰ The Bible mentions, in particular in Kings, the existence of annals. These appear to be lost forever, unless discovered by future archeological finds. Ben Zion Wacholder, "Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles", *HTR*, 61, 1968, pp.451- 481; *Eupolemus: A Study of Judae-Greek Literature*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, 3, Cincinnati, 1974; E. J. Bickerman, "The Jewish Historian Demetrios," in Neusner, J. (ed): *Christianity, Judaism, and other Greco-Roman Cults*, 12,3, pp. 72-84.

⁴¹ Eusebe of Cesarea, *Préparations Evangeliques*, translated by Edouard Des Places, Paris, Cerf, 1991; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, Alain de Boulluec, (ed) Paris, Cerf, 1981; Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, 1, Historians*, Society of Biblical Literature, Texts and Translations, 20, Chico, Scholars Press, 1983, pp. 51- 91.

⁴² See the hypothesis by Henrich Graetz, "Fälschungen in dem Texte der Septuaginta von christlicher Hand zu dogmatischen Zwecken," *MGWJ* 2, (1853): 432 - 436.

⁴³ *Yev* 82b; *Nid* 46b, *Sanh* 88a, *AZ*, 9a.

⁴⁴ Chaim Milikowsky, "Seder Olam and Jewish Chronography in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *PAAJR*, 52, 1985, pp. 115 - 139.

The advent of the savior, thus situated in the exact middle of the fifth millenium, coincided perfectly with the eschatological computations.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, when these chronographies were written, the (conception of the?)era was something of the distant future, the "present time" was calculated in terms of the number of years of a sovereign's rule. The Jewish era was still only a principle. An extra-Talmudic statement mentions a calculation of time starting from the exodus from Egypt up to the construction of the Temple and stating that : "since the Temple was built, people started to count from the date of building, then since no one remembered when it was constructed so we counted starting from its destruction."⁴⁶ The corpus of the Bible mentions the Persian or Arsacide dynasties, which are found in the books of Haggai, Daniel, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; the Mishna cites Median and Greek kingdoms⁴⁷ and the Talmud mentions the Seleucide era.⁴⁸ The oldest documentary, archeological and/ or epigraphic sources attest to the use of Jubilee cycles, of either 49 or 50 years,⁴⁹ as well as era of the destruction of the Temple and, briefly at the time of the Bar Kochba revolt, the era of *geulat yisrael*, the liberation of Israel, before the later development of the era of the creation of the world.

The process of determining the era of the creation of the world can be traced as a continuous progression. It begins timidly from the fourth and fifth centuries onwards and stabilizes, normalized in the twelfth century throughout the Jewish world.⁵⁰ More illustrative than a lengthy theoretical proof, epigraphy provides a snapshot of methods of dating at a given time. It shows the fluctuations of Jewish inscriptions in a Jewish era of time. Before cemeteries provided evidence of dating according to the era of the creation of the world, the catacombs and some tombstones testify to its gradual appearance, inscribing the moment of death for eternity. Epitaphs thus date the escape of the arithmetic of temporality from the sole register of scholarly writing. Recorded by the Italian scholar I. Ascoli in the

⁴⁵ Richard Landes, "Lest the millennium be fulfilled: Apocalyptic expectations and the pattern of western chronography 100 -800 ce" *The use and abuse of eschatology in the Middle Ages*, W. Verberke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen, Leuven University Press, 1988, pp. 137 - 212.

⁴⁶ *Mekhilta de rav. Ishmael, massekhet Yitro*, "in the third month"; see also JT *Rosh haShanah*.

⁴⁷ *Gittin*, 88,45.

⁴⁸ *AZ* 9

⁴⁹ Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles during the Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Period", in *HUCA*, 44, 1973, pp. 153 - 196.

⁵⁰ Edgar Frank, *Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology, The system of Counting Years in Jewish Literature*, New York, Philip Feldheim, 1956.

nineteenth century, the epigraphs of Brindisi, Venosa and Lavello testify either to the combined use of the era of the destruction of the Temple and the creation of the universe, or one or the other, ranging from 730 to 770 for its destruction, i.e. year 4579 to 4599 of the creation of the world.⁵¹ In the high Middle Ages, the Hebrew sources are dated by a whole series of references. The following example, from the year 1179 AD illustrates this perfectly: "We count 4939 years since the creation of the world, which corresponds to 1491 of the Seleucide era, which is 1931 of the construction of the Temple and 1111 years since its destruction - let it be rebuilt in our days - and 2491 since the exodus from Egypt."⁵² The next example comes from the fourteenth century: "It is the custom everywhere to count starting from the creation of the world."⁵³ Simultaneously with the Hegira in the East and the Incarnation in the West⁵⁴ sealing the dissolution of these religions with the times of the Old Testament, the institutionalization of the Jewish era of the creation of the world also marks the crystallization of Jewish temporality in transcendence. Sidelined, the markers connected to historical events (construction/destruction of the Temple) did not however fall into disuse; rather, they penetrated another register of temporality.

While the Christian liturgical calendar integrates dramatic events in the life of Christ into the annual calendar of the faithful⁵⁵, the Jewish calendar reproduces the history of the formation of the people of Israel, by inserting events in their seasonal place, starting from the original act of the creation of the world. Thus, although the Christian calendar leads to an identification of Christ as a figure, the Jewish calendar ensures the preservation of the group and its reconfirmation in a never-ending cycle.

⁵¹ Isaia G. Ascoli, *Iscrizioni inedite o mai note Greche, Latine, Hebraïche, di antichi sepolcri giudaici del Napolitano, Torino e Roma*, pp. 239 - 383, E. Loescher, 1880, see pp. 90 -91 (Umberto) Moshe David Cassuto, "ha-ketubot ha-ivriot shel he-me'a ha'teshi'it be'Vinossa" in *Kedem*, 2, 1945, pp. 99-120; David Moshe Cassuto, 'Seforan shel shetei matseivot min ha-me'a ha'teshi'it be'derom Italia." In *Yehudim be-Italia, Mehqarim. Jews in Italy, Studies Dedicated to the Memory of U. Cassuto, On the 100th Anniversary of his Birth*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1988, pp. 1-23.

⁵² Issac ben Abba Mari de Marseille (1120 - 1190 circa), *Sefer ha-Ittur*, Venice, 1608.

⁵³ Jacob Ben Asher (circa 1270 -1340) *Arba'a Turim*, Piove de Sacco, 1475, Halakhot Gittin, 10, 127.

⁵⁴ Venance Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines, I., La Chronologie*, Paris, PUF, 1958.

⁵⁵ See Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997; *Le Temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age XII - XIII siècles*, colloque du 9-12 mars 1981, Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1984.

From the solemn festivals in the Autumn which start the year, to the exodus from Egypt and the festival of the giving of the Torah, Biblical history traverses the holiday rituals and sets it within the eternal return of a sanctified temporality.⁵⁶ Far from encompassing everything within a single feature, the ritualized transitions from secular times to sacred times enables the coexistence of a multitude of temporalities. The historical events, or those connected to historical or charismatic figures, restricted to the ephemeral register, enable Judaism to perpetuate itself beyond time, since they must be inscribed "in all times." The calendar, in Judaism, thus may fulfill a function of harmonization between human life, the rhythm of Nature, and divine time.

Era and calendar are thus linked, in Judaism to the same event: the creation of the world. They express the same expectation: universal redemption which will end the course of historical time, by making it coincide with divine time. Paul Ricoeur's interpretation of the hierarchization of levels of temporality in Augustine takes on full meaning here. " [by presenting] an extension of time in terms of distension and describing human time as raised from the inside by the attraction of its pole to eternity, Augustine lent advance credence to the idea of a plurality of temporal levels.". From this standpoint, "periods of time are not Viewed in this standpoint, "periods of time are not simply/solely/only embedded in each /solely embedded in each other like numerical quantities, days in years, years in centuries". Over and beyond quantitative features, the question of human time aspires toward resolution through a qualitative component that Ricoeur formulates in terms of "graduated tension" which translates by these questions: "Since when?" "For how long", "In how much time?"⁵⁷

To these perennial questions, the Biblical chronologies, written by Jewish authors in late Antiquity, respond in their own fashion. Their measurement of time introduced a manifest movement between the articulations of universal history and distinctively Jewish history. Aiming either to insert episodes of Jewish history in the frame of the reigns of rulers whose existence was corroborated by historical sources, or to situate their narratives entirely within the temporality of their environment, as Josephus did in his *Jewish Wars*, these chronologies develop a Jewish history which unfolds in the multiplicity of historical times. In contrast, the *Seder Olam* ignores all reconstruction departing from the Biblical narrative.

⁵⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth Of The Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press 1974.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, 1, Paris, Seuil, 1983 - 1985; 1991, p.158.

The integration of the *Seder Olam* in the later rabbinical corpus demonstrates the simultaneity of a dual evolution, which came to an end during the second century. One trend tended to inscribe Jewish chronology in parallel to that of the nations, the other ignored it. Whereas chronologies based on the text of the Septuagint make (at least some) allegorical usage of the Bible for universalistic purposes, they attest in any case to the existence of an exegetic historical tradition, whose literal version alone has penetrated tradition, evincing perhaps other now lost writings. The process of emergence of normative Judaism may thus have led to the extirpation, from the heart of tradition, of the multiple insertion of Jews in history, for purposes of establishing a single Biblical narrative; this enabled a time scale to be positioned in the center of Jewish history. However the dual temporal register inherent to the situation of Israel among the nations was continued outside of these narratives. This enabled the Jews to adhere to a strictly Jewish temporality and at the same time to an external structure of time. In addition, these chronographies show that the era of the world, which was still unknown as such at their time, was nevertheless already used in chronographers' reformulations. Its later use can in a certain sense be compared to the use of the prophetic word. The year of the [creation of the] world is found in the biblical narrative and, well before it was used as a point of reference, can serve as a prime index for those who can interpret exegeses.

The rituals observed over the course of the centuries show that whereas the Jews have preserved the markers of creation and destruction, the marker of the Shemitta, reserved only for abstract rabbinical calculations, has only been restored meaning in recent times, through the return of the Jews to Palestine. Whereas the markers of creation and destruction can be considered to be historical, the Jubilee does not have the same features. Although it serves as a marker of time, it is cyclical and remains a-historical, since it does not commemorate a historical event, aside from the divine act of creation, which cannot be situated. Dating on the basis of the creation of the world is the outcome of an attempt at universal systematization, since the world belongs to all its inhabitants. However the destruction of the Temple can only be a marker to Jews, and the same is true for the Jubilee cycle which only affects them, singled out from all other owners of land. The Shemitta cycle is a direct remembrance of the seventh day assigned to the Jews, and like the Sabbath it is only the law for them. Of these three Jewish markers of time, one is hence universal and the other two are specifically Jewish. "Jewish time" is thus composed of a dose of universal and a dose of the specific, which tend to vary and be balanced differently depending on the era. This equilibration refers to F. Rozenzweig's "three times" -- creation, revelation and redemption -- in

which the proportion of universal and singular is reversed⁵⁸: creation and redemption are universal, whereas the revelation addresses itself to Jews alone. However Jewish time is thus formed through the use of a register of temporality which leads it to recreate, regardless of place, a "Jewish space/time."⁵⁹

For most scholars who have dealt with this issue, the construction of Jewish temporality is the outcome of a metamorphosis in the understanding of a divinely wrought history which may have led, because of its vicissitudes, to the permanent occultation of the integration of events into the present. Thus the dominant position concerning the attitude of Jews towards the writing of history can be summed up in one sentence: The destruction of the first Temple led to the idea of the closure of the biblical canon, and hence to the elaboration of the canon, whereas the destruction of the second Temple led to the end of history itself.⁶⁰ The first historical religion may thus have divested itself, when it entered into the Diaspora, of all taste for history, preferring from then on the savor of the Law, playing one against the other, the present of events and eternity. Freed from the vagaries of history, the rabbis also turned away from its other contingencies. They, in a certain way, succeeded in penetrating a "non-era", a suspended place in time, preferring to refer to the recollections of past times rather than to place themselves in the present. Applying a mythical treatment to biblical reading, they utilized the heroes of the scriptures for other purposes, turning them into emblematic figures for Torah study. The vision of linear time predominating in the Bible is transformed, and the rabbinical writings henceforth express a static vision of time.⁶¹ This is perhaps what Jacob Neusner meant by this statement: "The rabbis thus traded history for eternity."⁶² Basically it makes little difference whether this construction is authentic or not since the conviction that it was indeed so is both a source of very real attitudes towards the

⁵⁸ Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* 1921; *l'Etoile de la Redemption*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

⁵⁹ S.A. Goldberg, "de la Bible et des notions d'espace et de temps"... op.cit.

⁶⁰ Nahum Norbert Glatzer, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichtslehre des Tannaiten*, Berlin, Schocken, 1933, pp. 10-31, partially published as "The Tannaim and History" in J. Neusner (ed) *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* Atlanta, AAR 55, Scholars Press, 1990, pp 125 - 142, p.126.

⁶¹ Nissan Rubin and Admiel Kosman, "The clothing of the Primordial Adam as a symbol of Apocalyptic Time in Midrashic Sources" in *HTR*, 90, 2, 1997, pp. 155-174, p.157.

⁶² J. Neusner, "The Religious Uses of History: Judaism in First Century AD Palestine and Third Century Babylonia" in *History and Theory*, 5, 1966, pp. 153- 171, p. 167.

transmission of the Jews' distant past - and the basis of many scholarly works on them. This is perhaps the argument put forward by Henrich Graetz, when he said: "Judaism is not a religion of the past, but rather of the future."⁶³

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⁶³ Henrich Graetz, *Die Construction der jüdischen Geschichte*, 1846, *La Construction de l'histoire juive*, Paris, Cerf, 1992, p.48.